

The Hurricane Cone & You

Those of us who live along the Florida Gulf Coast should track every Atlantic hurricane or tropical storm. When a storm forms, you will hear weather forecasters talk about the “forecast cone.” The cone represents the probable track of the center of a storm. A “5-day cone” and “3-day cone” are created to show the forecast path of the center of the storm with as much as a 300-mile “cone of uncertainty.” Because the storm could track anywhere within the cone, everyone in the cone area needs to begin storm preparations.

The most important thing to remember is to do as much as you can before a hurricane warning is issued, even before a storm ever enters the Gulf of Mexico. Waiting until the warning is issued will only give you about 24 hours to complete preparations and evacuate if necessary. We must remember that hurricane forecasting is not an exact science and they don’t always go where predicted.

ACTIONS TO TAKE BEFORE THE CONE

- ☐ Make a family plan. Don’t forget special plans for elderly, handicapped, children and pets.
- ☐ Get a disaster supply kit (see page 8).
- ☐ Know your evacuation zone (see back cover).
- ☐ Understand “Watch” and “Warning” terms (see page 27).
- ☐ Purchase a NOAA weather radio.
- ☐ Trim trees and shrubs around your home.
- ☐ Make plans to secure your property. Permanent storm shutters are best. A second option is to board up windows with 5/8” marine plywood, cut to fit and ready to install. Tape does not prevent windows from breaking.

5-DAY CONE ACTIONS

- ☐ Review your family disaster plan.
- ☐ Get your survival kit and important papers ready.
- ☐ If you or a family member is elderly, handicapped or has special care needs, be sure you are ready to implement your special needs plan (see page 11).
- ☐ Take photos of your property from all angles. It may not look the same after the storm passes.
- ☐ Begin work to prepare your home and yard.
- ☐ Check for, fix or remove loose items on your structures/homes.
- ☐ Clear loose and clogged rain gutters and down spouts.
- ☐ If you live in an evacuation zone, know where you will go and how you will get there.

As a storm moves closer, the accuracy of the forecast improves. If Santa Rosa County is within the 3-day cone, residents should step up their preparations.

3-DAY CONE ACTIONS

- ☐ Double check your disaster kit and make necessary purchases to avoid lines and traffic.
- ☐ Gather special supplies for infants, children, seniors and pets.
- ☐ Be sure you have all materials and tools necessary to shutter windows.
- ☐ If your plans are to evacuate, make arrangements, book reservations and pack what you can in your vehicle.

About 48 hours ahead of a storm, forecasters will issue a hurricane watch for areas within the cone that can expect hurricane conditions. Again, because hurricanes can be erratic, everyone in that area must prepare as if the storm is headed directly for their home. If the storm changes path or speed, the time between a watch and a warning might be only six hours. During a watch, the focus should be on preparing for the warning.

If you are in an evacuation zone or a mobile/manufactured home, the goal is to be fully prepared to evacuate one or two hours ahead of the warning being issued if needed. If you live in a non-evacuation zone, the goal is to complete all preparations within one or two hours after the warning.

HURRICANE WATCH ACTIONS

- ☐ Fill vehicle gas tank.
- ☐ Get cash and secure papers and valuables.
- ☐ Refill medications.
- ☐ Fill containers and tubs with water, even if evacuating – you may need the water when you return.
- ☐ Bring in outdoor objects such as lawn furniture, toys and garden tools.
- ☐ Shutter your windows.
- ☐ Prepare boats (see page 25).
- ☐ Help neighbors with their preparations.

- ☐ If your plans are to evacuate out of the local area, make final preparations to secure your home so you can leave as soon as an evacuation order is issued.
- ☐ If you are registered for transportation to a public shelter, be sure you have everything you need for your “go bag”.

A storm will be about 36 hours from impact when the hurricane warning is issued. Santa Rosa County Emergency Management may issue official evacuation orders not long after a warning. Whenever any evacuation is ordered, all manufactured home residents should evacuate. For those not in manufactured homes, be sure to know your zone so you can understand and follow official emergency instructions.

HURRICANE WARNING ACTIONS

- ☐ Stay tuned to local news and get your weather radio ready.
- ☐ Complete any final preparations.
- ☐ Turn off utilities if instructed to do so. Otherwise, turn the refrigerator thermostat to its coldest setting and keep the doors closed.
- ☐ If your plan is to travel out of the local area and you can leave at this point, do so now to avoid traffic jams.
- ☐ If you are registered for transportation to a public shelter, have your “go bag” ready.
- ☐ If evacuation orders are issued, determine if your residence is affected.
 - ✓ If you are evacuating locally, leave for your designated safe location. If you are utilizing a public shelter, be sure to check which public shelters are open.
 - ✓ If you are not required to evacuate, prepare a safe room in your home and stay off the roads to enable evacuation traffic to clear the area.
- ☐ Notify your designated out-of-town contact and let them know where you are sheltering.
- ☐ Avoid using the phone, except for emergencies.